

KIWANIS CLUB

Head Start students celebrate the holiday

Key Club member Alex White helps Head Start student Aleecia Baker wrap her gifts Saturday morning during the Kiwanis Christmas party.

**By Nancy Hastings**

HILLSDALE — The Hillsdale Kiwanis Club hosted its yearly Christmas party for the children of Head Start Saturday morning. For club members, it's one of the biggest events on the calendar, exemplifying their commitment to children by first taking them shopping and then treating them to a party where they meet Santa, receive gifts and munch on homemade cookies. The event was started by Shirley Fowler approximately 14 years ago. This year, 31 children attended the event, where they first went to Wal-Mart to buy items for their family members.

Kiwanis members, along with volunteers from the Davis Middle School Builders Club and Hillsdale High School Key Club, were assigned to supervise the children, who came with lists of family members for whom to purchase gifts. Organizer and club President Valerie White said not only did Wal-Mart provide a 10 percent discount for the event, the store also donated a \$100 gift card, providing enough boy and girl gifts for the Head Start students from Santa. "It's a wonderful opportunity and the children are so proud to make Christmas for their families," White said, while facilitating the process of setting up one lane to check out the items purchased.

Michaela Bowditch, 11, helped Tayla Peavy, 4, choose something from the jewelry department while Diane Osbourne was nearby with Tayla's brother, Christopher. Osbourne attends the party each year and makes hat and mitten sets, along with Kiwanian Joan VanArsdalen, to give out to the children at the party. "I enjoy it and it gives me something to do while I'm watching baseball in the summer," Osbourne said. Head Start Health specialist Ruth Farwell was also serving as a volunteer shopper with her assigned youngster, Gary Keller. While sitting in the cart, Gary was entertained by pointing out all of Farwell's pins on her Christmas vest. "I like to come dressed festive ... I found my Santa hat in the closet," Farwell said. Head Start teacher Anita Young floated around the store, checking to see if volunteer shoppers needed assistance. "This is such a fantastic thing the Kiwanis Club does — it's huge," she said, on the verge of tears. "They touch a lot of families and this gets us ready for Christmas. It's nice to see the kids get something for their moms and dads." The giving spirit was evident among others as shoppers and children loaded the school buses to head back to the party site at the Hillsdale First United Methodist Church. Bus driver Bill Arnold announced he found a sale of donuts he had purchased for the party and "couldn't pass it up."

At the appointed time, parents joined the tots for refreshments and took pictures of their children as they visited with Santa and received gifts of their own. Ladies from the sewing group Band of Hope had made each child a stocking and filled it with coloring books, candy canes and more. Parent Brandy Hollingsworth said she appreciates the efforts made by all. "I love it," Hollingsworth said. "I've had five girls go through this program and it's a nice thing for the kids to be able to shop for their families."



Head Start student Trinity McKee is lifted up by Builder's Club member Taylor McClintic in order to choose the perfect cookie during the Kiwanis Christmas party Saturday. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO